

What is claimed is:

1. A utensil holder comprising:  
a case presenting a utensil-receiving opening; and  
a utensil-retaining rod assembly including a plurality of elongated, flexible rods,  
said rods being confined within the utensil-receiving opening in a manner that  
permits limited flexing movement of the rods, such that a utensil inserted  
into the opening is supported by the assembly and causes separation of  
adjacent ones of the rods to define a space that at least substantially  
collapses when the utensil is removed from the opening,  
said rods being restricted against lengthwise shifting relative to one another.

3. A utensil holder as claimed in claim 1,  
said case being formed of a synthetic resin.

4. A utensil holder as claimed in claim 1,  
said case including a floor and wall structure projecting generally upwardly from  
the floor, with the utensil-receiving opening being cooperatively defined  
by the floor and wall structure.

5. A utensil holder as claimed in claim 4,  
said floor and wall structure being solid so as to permit fluid containment within  
the utensil-receiving opening.

5. A utensil holder as claimed in claim 3,  
said wall structure terminating at a substantially planar uppermost edge,  
said rods extending lengthwise along the wall structure and cooperatively  
presenting an endmost, substantially flat entry face through which the  
utensil is first inserted,  
said entry face being generally flush with the uppermost edge of the wall  
structure.

6. A utensil holder as claimed in claim 5,  
said floor being substantially flat,

said case including a plurality of feet configured to support the floor in a substantially horizontal orientation.

<sup>8</sup>  
~~8~~ A utensil holder as claimed in claim <sup>7</sup>~~8~~,

said uppermost edge of the wall structure being substantially parallel to the floor, and said rods being substantially equal in length.

<sup>9</sup>  
~~8~~ A utensil holder as claimed in claim <sup>172</sup>~~8~~,

said utensil-receiving opening having a generally square cross-sectional shape.

9. A utensil holder as claimed in claim <sup>17</sup>~~1~~,

said utensil-retaining rod assembly being configured to prevent relative ~~to~~ lengthwise shifting of the rods so that the assembly may be unitarily removed from the utensil-receiving opening.

10. A utensil holder as claimed in claim 9, said utensil-retaining rod assembly including a base, said rods being <sup>relative</sup> fixed to the base and projecting therefrom.

<sup>10</sup>  
~~11~~ A utensil holder as claimed in claim <sup>172</sup>~~10~~,

said base presenting a cross-sectional shape that is similar to but <sup>relatively</sup> slightly smaller than that of the utensil-receiving opening.

<sup>11</sup>  
~~12~~ A utensil holder as claimed in claim <sup>172</sup>~~10~~,

said base being located adjacent a common end of the rods, with the rods being otherwise detached from one another.

<sup>sub a2</sup>  
~~13~~ 13. A utensil holder as claimed in claim 12,

said rods cooperatively defining an endmost entry face opposite from the base, said entry face spanning the utensil-receiving opening so that the utensil pierces through the entry face and then passes along the length of the rods.

<sup>12</sup>  
~~14~~ A utensil holder as claimed in claim <sup>172</sup>~~10~~,

said rods and said base being formed of a synthetic resin.

<sup>13</sup>  
~~13~~A utensil holder as claimed in claim <sup>12</sup>  
~~14~~,

said base being formed cooperatively by the rods and a synthetic resin filler interspersed among the rods, with the rods and filler being bonded to one another.

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<sup>14</sup>  
~~14~~A utensil holder as claimed in claim <sup>13</sup>  
~~15~~,

said synthetic resin filler being acrylic.

Sub  
a3

17.

A utensil holder as claimed in claim 1,

said rods having common detached ends that cooperatively define an endmost entry face spanning the utensil-receiving opening so that the utensil pierces through the entry face and then passes along the length of the rods.

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<sup>15</sup>  
~~15~~A utensil holder as claimed in claim <sup>22</sup>  
~~17~~,

said ends of the rods being rounded.

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<sup>16</sup>  
~~16~~A utensil holder as claimed in claim <sup>22</sup>  
~~18~~,

said rods being substantially equal in cross-sectional shape and size.

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<sup>17</sup>  
~~20~~A utensil holder as claimed in claim <sup>16</sup>  
~~19~~,

said rods being cylindrical.

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